

A CHRONICLE OF THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE AXBRIDGE CAVING GROUP AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Compiled By J.W. Hunt December 1968
Transcribed by: K.R. Wills October 1988

NOTE: All references to literary sources or any other comments made by the author are written in italics following the relevant passage of text.

A chronicle of the excavations of the Axbridge Caving Group & Archaeological Society During the eleven years 1950 to 1960 inclusive.

March 1950	<p>Preparations being made to excavate rock shelter in base of cliffs at Barton Rocks just west of Wolfs Den. Excavation of a Cave on Axbridge Hill near the Ochre Cave led to discovery of a recently built wall. <i>Minutes of the monthly meetings 1950 April 1950</i></p> <p>The excavation at Barton Rocks was pursued throughout this year, revealing a Cave passage made use of by Badgers, Birds of prey etc. It was understood to have been a Goat-pen and traces of wire netting were found, also Iron nails were still in the rock sides. Earlier levels in the rock Shelter entrance revealed traces of many fires having been lit, the earliest one yielding a fragment of base of a reddish Romano British pot of circa 300A.D. date. All of the entrance floor was excavated to solid rock. <i>Reports were sent to HE.Balch, Wells, But no full report published.</i></p>
February 1951	<p>Permission obtained of Mr Heal to excavate Banwell Caves. Mr P.F. Baker of Banwell found to have already started excavating his extension (in October 1950). <i>Agreement with Mr Heal dated 21/2/51 A.C.G. Journal</i></p> <p>University of Bristol Speleological Society also digging bone deposits in E. Branch of Bone Cave (One foot deep layer over areas I & II) . Earth being thrown down Beards Shaft nearby. <i>J.W.F/s Records. A.CG. Journal</i></p>
April 1951	<p>An area of Bone deposits about 6ft x 3ft in Main Chamber of Bone Cave excavated to a depth of one foot by A.C.G.& A.S. <i>J.W.Hs Records</i></p> <p>Lowest level of bone deposits passed through in Bakers extension, which is now at a depth of 9 feet below Bone Cave floor level & 16 feet in length. Excavations on Axbridge Hill continuing, including excavation of a Well Shaft, where a brick lined culvert was found. <i>A.C.G. Journal</i></p>
May 1951	<p>Bakers Extension 13ft below floor level & 21ft long.</p>
June 1951	<p>Small breakthrough in Extension into cave 5ft 6" <i>ACG Journal.</i></p> <p>Further extension of Banwell Levvy or Sprite's Cave discovered. <i>ACG Journal.</i></p>
July 1951	<p>Excavation of Scragg's Hole commenced. <i>Minutes</i></p>
Sep/Oct 1951	<p>Assistance given in excavating water worn rift in Conglomerate rock at Yarborough where H.J. Hawk ins had started digging in 1950. <i>No report JWHs Records</i></p>

	At a depth of 10ft small passage leads east towards road. Recent remains found.
October 1951	Cave roof again located in Bakers Extension at much greater depth.
November 1951	Part of extension collapses.
December 1951	Roman Villa site at Star examined, but members driven off by irate farmer. <i>Minutes.</i>
January 1952	Ochre Cavern Axbridge surveyed for further extension. Bakers extension now 33ft below floor level and 50ft in length.
February 1952	Subsidence of old mine workings behind Council houses, High St. Banwell, investigated. <i>ACG Journal JWHs Records</i>
March 1952	Two more chambers discovered in Ochre Cave Axbridge. Attempt to get through boulder block in bakers Extension proves too dangerous. J. Garlick finds passage in east branch of Bone Chamber. <i>ACG Journal</i>
1st April 1952	Excavation of layer 1, area 1 bone deposits in east branch of Bone Cave commenced. <i>JWHs Records</i>
May 1952	New Chamber opened up in Stalactite Cave besides "Bishops Chair". The disaster at Banwell Tower mine occurs. Scragg's Hole surveyed and photographed. <i>ACG Journal</i>
June 1952	Small excavation made in exterior of Wolfs Den, Barton Rocks.
June/July 1952	Scragg's Hole - cooked bones of large birds, Black pottery & Romano British pottery found and excavations proceeding in charcoal layer. Slate (Cornish) found. <i>Minutes no reports.</i>
11 June 1952	Continued Layer 2 area 1 commenced to be excavated (Bone Cave) <i>JWH</i> Excavation or, west side of Axbridge (Fry's) Hill started in search of "Lost Cave". Excavations commence at future Triple "H" dig.
8 October 1952	October Layer 3 Area 1 commenced to be excavated (Bone Cave) <i>JWH</i>
29 October 1952	Work resumed in Bakers Extension. Axbridge Westernmost dig hits solid rock at 35ft.
19 Nov 1952	Ruby Chamber & Mud Passage discovered (Bakers Extension).
26 Nov 1952	Galleries Discovered.
28 Nov 1952	Frozen Rivers Grotto Discovered.
31 Dec 1952	Torturers Vice opened up.
January 1953	Barton Rock Shelter blasted but no continuation discovered. <i>Minutes</i>
7 January 1953	Pilgrims Pause Chamber discovered, Bakers Extension. <i>JHW</i>

February 1953	False floor in Banwell Levvy blasted in and passage sealed. <i>JHW</i>
March 1953	Solid rock struck in dig at end of Galleries (left side) <i>JWH</i> . Excavation of Mud Passage commenced.
April 1953	Buried formations found in Mud Passage mud. Triple "H" Cave discovered.
11/12 April 1953	Steel door fitted to Bone Cave and Iron ladder fitted in Bakers Extension.
May 1953	Almost 300 Bones excavated at Triple "H" Bone Cave. <i>Minutes</i> . Bones in the side of remainder of "Beards Shaft" (Banwell Bone Cave) examined, and excavations alongside commenced. <i>JHW</i>
June 1953	Triple "H" surveyed and base line established outside. Cave is now 90ft long with boulder blocked extension to the west. <i>Minutes</i>
July 1953	Another entrance made to Triple "H". <i>Minutes</i> Bone Cave Banwell Layer 3 Area 1 completed. <i>JHW</i>
22 July 1953	Layer 1 Area 2 to be excavated. <i>JHW</i>
August 1953	Two horizontal bone layers excavated at Triple "H". <i>Minutes</i>
19 August 1953	Voices of diggers by Beards Shaft heard in Torturers Vice series. <i>JHWs Records</i>
September 1953	Excavation made at (Shaft sunk at extreme end) end of east branch of Bone Cave where traces of old diggings (Old pit props) were encountered. Self tipping winch installed at Triple "H". Layer 4 being excavated and bones found at far end of cave. <i>Minutes</i>
November 1953	Layer 5 Triple "H" commenced to be excavated. Oakhill Swallet investigated. <i>Minutes</i>
December 1953	Excavations commenced at Oakhill Swallet. <i>Minutes</i>
January 1954	Trial boring to stalagmite floor in Triple "H". <i>Minutes</i>
20 February 1954	Water pumped down fissure by Beards Shaf, it soon came pouring down shute at end of Stalactite Cave, left of Bishops Chair. <i>JHW</i> Triple "H" Layer 6 excavated. <i>Minutes</i>
March 1954	Bone deposits examined in Banwell Ochre Cave. White lines painted to mark layers in east branch of Bone Cave. E.J Chapman commences his survey of Bone Cave. <i>JHW</i>
11 April 1954	Boulder block at end of Stalactite Cave blasted but no results (Bob Price). Triple "H" layer 7 excavated. <i>Minutes</i> Oakhill Swallet- Both entrances excavated and blasting took place. <i>Minutes</i>

May 1954	Cave South West of Triple "H" excavated for 45ft. Small fissure excavated on hill to east.
3 June 1954	Layer 4 area 1 Banwell Bone Cave commenced to be excavated. <i>JHW</i>
23 June 1954	Excavations commenced at end of Mud Passage, where buried stalagmites were still being found.
June 1954	Galvanised sheeting was erected over the bone dig to protect it from dripping water.
7 July 1954	Gas Grotto discovered at end of Mud Passage.
14 July 1954	Noxious gas (later identified as Co2) encountered in Mud Passage and Gas Grotto. Further excavation of layer 4 area 1 bone deposits.
26 July 1954	Decided to ban all further excavation in Mud Passage and Gas Grotto until Gas disperses.
6 August 1954	Agreement with Mr Harding signed re: Permission to excavate Winthill.
14 August 1954	Excavations commence at Winthill, Human burials and Romano foundations discovered. Banwell small fissure dig, Axbridge Hill continue.
September 1954	Gas Danger still present (Bone Cave)
October 1954	Excavations started in Galleries in Torturers Vice area. Winthill trial trench now 60ft long 5ft wide and 4-54 ft deep. Cave at Mendip lodge investigated.
December 1954	Further excavations in small offshoot on right hand side of Mud Passage (Gas danger minimal). Ruby Chamber and Galleries being surveyed. Winthill excavations now advanced into an upper terrace, Roman foundations discovered.
January 1955	Winthill trial trench now 70ft long, 5 ft wide. Excavation in Mud Passage continues, depth of 5-6ft reached.
February 1955	Permission to enter Coral Cave. Steel door prepared. <i>Minutes</i> Permission to be sole society to develop Chelmscombe Quarry Cave obtained. <i>Minutes</i>
March 1955	Gas still present in Gas Grotto. Excavations cease in Mud Passage due to difficult working conditions. 50 antler bases sent from Banwell Bone Cave to A.J.Sutcliffe.
April 1955	Excavation starting at Sandford Cave. Excavation started on Shute Shelve Barrow. ACG Journal Drainage Channels cut in Bone Cave floor.

May 1955	More of room discovered in December 1954 exposed at Winthill.
June 1955	Chelmscombe Cave investigated and surveyed by E. J. Chapman.
June/July 1955	Meadow Street Axbridge rescue dig.
August 1955	Further excavations at Shute Shelve site (which continue spasmodically throughout the year).
September 1955	Winthill trial trench completed: 108-ft long, 5t wide, 3-5-ft deep. Formations salvaged from Chelmscombe Cave. Excavation at Stockhill (cave) permission obtained. Attempt to locate Hutton Cave.
November 1955	Excavation to be resumed at "Crater dig" on Axbridge hill (South west of Triple "H"). An Archaeological excavation at St Columbands Chapel, Manor Farm Cheddar, contemplated but not attempted as it was about to be scheduled for preservation.
January 1956	Stockhill Swallet excavation in progress.
February 1956	Shute Shelve barrow excavation continues.
March 1956	Axbridge Hill well to be covered and Triple "H" to be fenced.
May 1956	Well Shaft Axbridge Hill, fenced round. Winthill excavation recommenced. Six 10-ft square grids marked out east of trial trench. Excavation of grids BI, BII and CI commenced.
June 1956	Grids AI, AII and CII commenced to be excavated.
July 1956	Hut erected at Winthill. Grid AII completely excavated and shaft 35ft deep discovered. Shute Shelve and Stockhill continue.
August 1956	Grid CII completely excavated. Excavations made at Bodury Farm, Green Ore. One is a rescue dig of Medieval dwelling sites and the other an excavation of a swallet.
September 1956	Grids AI, BI and BII completely excavated. Baulks between grids commenced.
October 1956	Excavation work restarted in Banwell Bone Cave. Grid CI completely excavated. More Baulks excavated.
4 November 1956	Winthill Glass Bowl & Beaker excavated. Excavation at this site completed this month.
December 1956	Winthill excavations filled in.
1957	In the early part of this year, and did mine working was re-discovered in the entrance to the Stalactite Cave Banwell

11 May 1957	Preparations made for further excavations at Winthill. Grids marked out. <i>Minutes</i>
May 1957	Permission sought of Messers Toogood to commence excavating Hay Wood site.
June 1957	Excavation made at Hay Wood rock shelter. <i>Minutes</i>
June/July 1957	Excavations in a cave in Banwell Quarry?
July 1957	Permission for excavations at Winthill refused. <i>Minutes</i> Shute Shelve Barrow dig in operation.
August 1957	Pottery & Bone found at Hay Wood (an archaeological trial trench about 3ft wide and 5ft deep was excavated in the entrance during this year). <i>Minutes</i> The Stalactite Cave Banwell surveyed by J.W.Hunt, T.Raines & I.Magill.
September 1957	Green Ore Swallet dig progressing. <i>Minutes</i>
October 1957	Explorations in Denny's Hole, further passage found. <i>Minutes</i> Much Gas reported present again in Bone Cave new series.
November 1957	Green Ore dig stated to be an official A.C.G.& A.S dig. Society has no objection to R.A.F. Locking Caving Club excavating a shaft in Banwell Castle entrance gateway. Shute Shelve Barrow dig continues. <i>Minutes</i>
November 1957	Shelter erected over Hay Wood dig.
December 1957	Triple "H" fenced round.
March 1958	Shaft sunk besides Beards old one now being filled in. Permission received to put Steel door on Coral Cave and concrete it. Excavations at Haywood resumed. <i>Minutes</i>
6 July 1958	Door to Coral Cave fixed.
July 1958	Shaft in Bone Cave now filled in. <i>Minutes</i>
September 1958	Further work at Green Ore Swallet. <i>Minutes</i>
October 1958	A rising of water investigated near Winscombe Church. <i>Minutes</i>
January 1959	Weather conditions prevent further excavations at Green Ore. Loose boulders in Coral Cave made safe. <i>Minutes</i>
1 March 1959	Trial trenching commences at Star Shipham Roman Villa site. <i>Minutes</i>
9 April 1959	Agreement re: Star site signed with owner. Mr F.G.Adams. <i>Minutes</i>
April 1959	Decided to purchase hut for Star site. Excavations at Haywood resumed. Excavations in Bakers extension resumed. <i>Minutes</i>
May 1959	Excavations continue in Bakers extension.

25 May 1959	J.W.Hunt makes a note that a Plaque and Whale ribs from W. Beard's demolished Bone Cottage, Winthill, Banwell, had been placed in the Bone cave entrance.
July 1959	75ft deep pothole discovered at Quarry near Hillier's Hole. Excavations continue in Bakers extension. <i>Minutes</i>
Sep to Dec 1959	Star site excavations being filled in. <i>Minutes</i>
February 1960	Lease obtained for further seasons work at Star Shipham site. <i>Minutes</i>
Mar/Apr 1960	Excavations resumed at Star and at Haywood. <i>Minutes</i>
May 1960	Price's Squeeze (Bakers Extension) and entrance to Galleries strengthened with brickwork.
July 1960	Some filling in of Star excavations commenced. <i>Minutes</i>
August 1960	Evidence of pre-Roman occupation of Star site reported. <i>Minutes</i>